ELEMENT 721: WATER SUPPLY POLICIES FOR RHODE ISLAND

01 INTRODUCTION

The State Planning Council adopted State Guide Plan Element 721, *Water Supply Policies for Rhode Island*, on September 11, 1997. It carries forward many of the relevant policies and themes of the original element adopted by the Council in 1988, which it replaces. It has a companion element 722, *Water Supply Plan for Rhode Island,* adopted in 1991.

The key objective of the plan is to develop long range policies that protect water quantity and quality in the most cost-effective and environmentally sound manner. It identifies goals, formulates policies, and recommends action based on sound strategies deemed essential to maintaining existing and protecting future water supplies.

The preparation of this document is largely due to the extensive efforts of the Water Supply Policy Advisory Committee that was appointed by the State Planning Council as representative of the different water supply interests of the state.

In planning for Rhode Island's water supply, the following basic premises must be accepted concerning water-related issues.

- Water is a limited resource and, as such, shall be equitably managed for all users and purposes under a process that emphasizes efficiency of use and management, protection of existing and potential supplies, and other techniques to ensure that water is available in sufficient quantity and quality to meet the state's current and future needs.

- It is in the public interest to protect the purity of present and future drinking water supplies by requiring maximum protection of reservoirs and aquifers, and to support regional efforts to manage watersheds and recharge areas of drinking water supplies.

- Although drinking water supplies are of sufficient quantity to meet our current needs, improved system management and implementation of demand management measures will support the enhanced utilization of sustainable resources to meet Rhode Island's future potable water requirements.

- As a primary caretaker for water resources, the state has a responsibility to address water resource utilization issues in a manner that adequately protects the health, safety, and welfare of the general public; continues to support growth and economic development of the state; and improves the quality of life in Rhode Island in a cost-efficient and environmentally sound manner.

- Maximizing water supply potential should not present unresolvable conflicts with competing interests; adoption of state laws and policies must consider the needs and objectives of state agencies, water suppliers, and other private and public interests.

02 ISSUES ADDRESSED

The planning process began with the development of a mission or vision statement. Issues or problem statements were then identified and grouped in the context of three broad categories: supply management, demand management, and planning and administrative management.

The supply management category addresses water resource protection, development of new sources, and direction for local planning initiatives. Demand management is aimed at ensuring increased awareness of the importance of water conservation while encouraging technological advances to promote user efficiencies. Planning and administrative management is necessary to establish baseline standards for emergency response and preventative maintenance within the infrastructure of supply systems. This category also deals with functional responsibility for coordination and planning required for cost control, regionalization, and maintaining the viability of small systems within the state.

03 SUMMARY OF POLICIES

The policies presented in summary form are the result of an exhaustive evaluation of issues and debate by the Water Supply Policy Advisory Committee. Many of the issues and the resultant policies could be classified in more than one category, just as they could be implemented at more than one jurisdictional level. The statements are classified in three general categories: 1) supply management, 2) demand management, and 3) planning and administrative management.

Supply Management

S-1 Water systems shall strive to provide water that is of the highest quality practical. However, where feasible and appropriate, water shall be matched to the quality necessary for that purpose. (Reuse of water is encouraged where feasible and appropriate).

S-2 Effective watershed management and aquifer protection initiatives shall be implemented to prevent degradation and improve the quality of existing and potential water supply sources. (Measures are intended to protect water quality by managing watershed lands owned by public water systems and land in private ownership.)

S-3 Existing sources of supply shall not be abandoned as long as their water quality remains acceptable for intended uses and feasible for future reactivation. (Feasibility includes consideration of quality of the source, safe yield, cost effectiveness analysis, and other statutory and non-financial constraints.) Water suppliers shall not unreasonably be prevented from demonstrating that abandonment is in the best interest of the system.

S-4 Public access and recreational use of surface water reservoirs shall be prohibited, and involved parties shall strive to eliminate existing uses in a fair and equitable manner.

S-5 Adequacy of supplies shall be monitored on an on-going basis.

S-6 Where feasible, water suppliers shall develop and enhance system redundancy (back-up capability) and expand interconnections for emergency response.

S-7 The state shall strive to coordinate interstate and intrastate agreements that support mutual water supply and watershed protection interests.

S-8 Land use regulations shall support water quality protection for public and private supply sources including individual wells.

S-9 Municipalities shall balance the use of land and water resources in cooperation with local water supplier(s) serving their respective jurisdictions by considering:

- balancing new development with available water supply;
- encouraging development that utilizes the existing infrastructure;
- considering cumulative impacts of development within watersheds and recharge areas;
- considering safe yield and capacity of the water supply and delivery system within community comprehensive plans;
- discouraging the formation of new small water systems;
- efficiently utilizing existing supply sources;
- protecting water quality through local land use and zoning or other appropriate means and methods.

S-10 Municipalities shall coordinate with appropriate state and local authorities and work toward the elimination of existing non-viable water systems.

S-11 Adequate future water supplies shall be provided through on-going short and long term planning, identification of need, evaluation of potential new water supplies, protection by advance acquisition, and other methods.

S-12 As a condition of approving new community sources, the following criteria shall be followed:

- the need for the new source based on factors such as adequacy of supply, quality of existing sources, redundancy, etc.;
- potential expansion of existing sources;
- permanent water savings resulting from demand management initiatives.

Demand Management

D-1 Demand management, including the establishment of attainable and targeted water use reduction objectives, shall be an integral part of water resource management.

D-2 Water suppliers shall implement conservation programs to encourage their customers to use water efficiently.

D-3 Water suppliers shall strive to reduce peak demands.

D-4 Commercial and industrial consumers proposing new uses, or major changes of use, shall utilize appropriate technical standards for consumption projections and shall utilize cost-effective, state-of-the-art equipment for controlling water use.

Planning and Administrative Management

P-1 Water for drinking and the sustenance of life shall be the priority use while striving to protect other uses and considering public health, safety, and the overall economic well-being of the state.

P-2 Water system facilities and infrastructure shall be maintained and improved to:

- protect public health, safety, and welfare;
- protect the investment of the rate payers and proprietors;
- ensure efficient use and quantity of water supplies.

P-3 The Department of Health shall maintain primacy for and continue to enforce the requirements of the Safe Water Drinking Act (SWDA.)

P-4 Water systems shall implement cross-connection and backflow prevention programs.

P-5 Non-viable systems shall be consolidated or restructured when public health is at risk, or when the public interest or greater economies of scale may be realized.

P-6 Withdrawals from both surface and groundwater sources shall be managed based on improved data taking into consideration the safe yield of surface reservoirs and the recharge rate of groundwater aquifers.

P-7 The professional development of water system employees shall be enhanced through educational and certification programs.

P-8 Water suppliers shall strive to minimize non-account water.

P-9 The Statewide Planning Program shall periodically review progress toward implementation of the policies, with information provided by the Water Resources Board and others, as required. The progress report shall also include recommendations for legislation as necessary for implementation of water supply policies.

P-10 Standardized methods for collection and reporting of data on water production, water use, and demand projections shall be established and used.

P-11 Public water systems shall have financial and operational independence to manage their resources effectively.

P-12 Measures shall be taken to ensure that water systems meet SDWA standards and maintain their technical, operational, and financial viability.

P-13 Develop an integrated database that shall include groundwater levels, precipitation, stream flow, and other data needed to determine safe yield and the recharge rates of surface supplies and groundwater aquifers to serve the needs of water system managers and the planning functions of the state.

P-14 Pricing structures shall reflect the total, just, and reasonable costs of the supply, operation, and protection of water systems, capital improvements, and replacement of infrastructure.

P-15 Technical information shall be made available to consumers to facilitate demand management and to guide the resource management activities of water systems.

P-16 Financial and other incentives may be used to promote the provision of safe drinking water, conservation, and the elimination of non-viable systems.

P-17 State and local revenues and surcharges collected from drinking water supplies shall be restricted to their intended purpose.

P-18 The State shall support the state's drinking water revolving loan fund and shall appropriate matching funds.

P-19 As an integral part of water system management, public awareness shall be promoted for:

- the importance of watershed and wellhead protection;
- nonpoint source pollution impacts;
- realization of the true costs of water; and
- the importance of efficient water use.

04 STRATEGIES

The policies in this plan support the formation of a sustainable water future, with clear criteria and strategies for working toward it. The strategies, viewed as a toolbox of practical steps supporting the policies, identify specific initiatives to be achieved at local, municipal, and state levels. The objective is to maintain the integrity of the ecosystem that is the backbone of continued viability, and ensure that water is available in both sufficient water quality and quantity to meet present and future needs essential to the enjoyment and improvement of quality of life in Rhode Island.